

specialised area of transfusion medicine in neonatology.

Edge's chapter on cerebral oedema in diabetic ketoacidosis highlights the difficulties in initially recognising the onset of this life threatening condition. However, she clearly stresses early warning signs such as headache and emphasises the importance of meticulous nursing care in these vulnerable young people. She recommends the useful consensus statement on management available from the British Society of Paediatric Endocrinology and Diabetes and offers useful key points for clinical practices such as delaying insulin treatment for at least an hour after starting fluids.

Titus K Ninan provides a good review of a difficult topic in his chapter on 'brittle asthma'. It is clearly pitched at the general paediatrician. He discusses conditions that might masquerade as asthma and factors that may contribute to loss of control in asthma using clear lists and text boxes. Therapy options are discussed and also thresholds for referral for a tertiary respiratory opinion, useful guidance for primary care physicians.

Many primary care doctors will find the chapter on ADHD helpful. It provides a succinct overview of the condition with diagnostic criteria and suggested therapies. Importantly, Rappley considers mental health conditions that could mimic or co-exist with ADHD. The only drawback for UK doctors is the use of the DSM IV subtype criteria rather than ICD 10. However, clear clinical descriptions of the diagnostic criteria should avoid confusion.

This book refreshed my knowledge on less common conditions such as autoimmune brain disorders and lupus. The chapter on medication errors is a worthwhile read for all doctors. The literature reviews accompanying each chapter were good on the whole. The final literature review dated from 2004 which was a little disappointing as the book has gone to press in 2006 nevertheless it is a useful quick reference for topics such as infant feeding, child abuse and screening. Overall a worthwhile read providing easy to follow comprehensive reviews.

Claire T Lundy

Oxford Handbook of Clinical Diagnosis Huw Llewelyn, Hock Aun Ang, Keir E Lewis, Anees Al-Abdullah. Oxford University Press, Oxford UK. October 2005. 704pp £22-95. ISBN 0-19-263249-3.

The 'handbook' title implies a pithy, accessible, easily-carried, essential element of the houseman's arsenal. While the book was useful at ward level, it was in more of a reference role than as a crucial bedside tool.

It is well structured. It is divided into three main sections, with lists of differential diagnoses associated with particular symptoms, signs and abnormal investigative findings. It was most useful in formulating an extended differential in the complex patient; and as a guide to further investigation. The

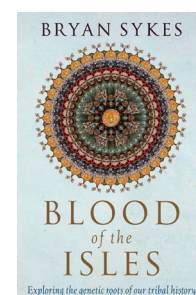


section on the chest x-ray was excellent, providing succinct descriptions and exhaustive explanations for a range of chest film abnormalities.

The book would be a beneficial addition to any medical ward either at the nurses' station or in the doctors' office. It offers a different perspective to most of the other pocket books on the market. However, it does not provide fundamental information critical to daily bedside decision-making. We would recommend this book for consultation at ward level but not as an indispensable purchase for every junior doctor.

AS Fitzpatrick, Marshall Riley

The Blood of the Isles. Bryan Sykes. Bantam Press. September 2006. 400pp. £17.99 ISBN: 0-593056523



The human quest for our origins is as old as our species itself. It has spawned all sorts of crazy theories and legends, from the idyllic fantasies of the Garden of Eden and Noah's Ark, to the mythical Aryan racism that fuelled Nazi Germany and still persists in some quarters. The genetic history of Great Britain, Ireland, and nearby islands ("The Isles" of Professor Sykes's title) is itself associated with strong emotions, contradictory legends, and imagined histories, which may or may not have any basis in fact. Bryan Sykes is something of a legend himself - a distinguished clinical geneticist and expert on collagen disorders, he turned his hand to "genetic archaeology" - the study of ancient and modern populations by unpicking the discrete and information-laden sequences of the genes they carry.

In Sykes's first foray into the popularisation of this approach, he wrote "The Seven Daughters of Eve", a fascinating romp through the history of our maternal genetics. The reader will be familiar with the cellular role and characteristics of mitochondria, but their particular value to the genetic archaeologist lies in the property that they contain their own DNA (they are the evolutionary relics of once-free-living bacteria that engaged in a highly significant and successful alliance with the ancestors of all eukaryotic cells), and this DNA is exclusively maternally inherited. The logical upshot of this is that your mitochondrial DNA is inherited from your mother, who got it from her mother, and so on, right back through human history and prehistory - indeed back through our common ancestors with the other great apes, other primates, mammals, vertebrates, and to the very first proper eukaryotic cell itself. Although this is perhaps obvious, it is nonetheless an arresting thought, and one that clearly appeals to Sykes. Motherhood, right back to when we diverged from apple pie.

A similar principle (this time following the male line exclusively) applies to the Y chromosome, the scrappy little chunk of DNA that is really only responsible for conferring maleness to an embryo that would otherwise follow a female developmental trajectory. In "Adam's Curse", Sykes re-worked "Seven Daughters of Eve" for the boys, and identified five patriarchal "clans" to add to the seven matriarchal ones he had identified as contributing to the vast majority of extant Europeans.